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THE ROLE OF THE CHAIRMAN--PROBLEMS OF ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGE.

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ALTHOUGH THE PROBLEMS OF CHAIRMEN DIFFER DEPENDING ON THE SIZE AND NATURE OF THE INSTITUTION, TOO LITTLE ATTENTION IS PAID TO THESE DIFFERENCES IN THE RECRUITING OF A CHAIRMAN. IN ORDER TO FILL A VACANT CHAIRMANSHIP ADEQUATELY, A PROGRAM SHOULD BE SET UP TO INDUCT THOSE WITH THE RIGHT TALENTS AND INCLINATIONS INTO MINOR ADMINISTRATIVE POSITIONS, AND FORM A CADRE FROM WHICH PRINCIPAL ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICERS MAY BE DRAWN. SUCH TRAINING IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE (1) ROTATION AND SHORT-TERM APPOINTMENTS ARE OBSOLETE, AND THERE IS A LACK OF SYSTEMATIC PROGRAMS OF INDUCTION, (2) THE MANAGERIAL REVOLUTION IN EDUCATION IS INCREASING THE IMPORTANCE OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS, AND (3) THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT CHAIRMAN CAN FULFILL A LARGER ROLE ONLY IF HE IS GIVEN PREVIOUS TRAINING IN PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN "THE ADE BULLETIN," NUMBER 16, NOVEMBER 1967, PAGES 5-7. (BN)

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## THE ROLE OF THE CHAIRMAN: PROBLEMS OF ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGE

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The October issue of the ADE Bulletin records, in the addresses given at the Summer Seminar by talented and experienced members of the profession, many wise and memorable observations. Since the assembly was made up of chairmen, and was organized for their benefit, it was predictable that much should be said not only about the function of a Department of English and the chairman's varied responsibilities for its proper functioning, but also about the opportunities and (at least by implication) the satisfactions which he can expect from his job. It is with something of a surprise, therefore, that the reader discovers from Mr. Shugrue's News Notes in the same issue of the Bulletin that no fewer than 187 new chairmen in four-year colleges and universities, and 125 chairmen in junior and community colleges, are being inducted into office during the current year. At once the question presents itself: Why so large a turnover?

No doubt the matter is one which calls for a Commission, a grant, questionnaires, conferences—a study. But before such an inquiry is initiated, perhaps a few hypotheses should be advanced and discussed—and here they are.

To begin with the obvious, it must be remembered that raw statistics tell little. Chairmen die, chairmen retire, chairmen are incapacitated by illness, chairmen are promoted to deanships and presidencies, chairmen move from one institution to another (without ceasing to be chairmen), chairmen resign, and chairmen are 'rotated' out of office. It may be worth the effort to discover how many fall into each category annually, and whether the replacement rate is greater in small departments of English than in large departments, larger in departments of English than in departments of mathematics or sociology; but even if these facts were known, some significant factors would remain undisclosed.

It is obvious that chairmanships differ greatly from institution to institution; and that any profile of the chairman that is drawn will be a caricature. The problems of the chairman in a small private college with an enrollment of 1000 are very different from those in a municipal university where a majority of the 20,000 students live at home and study on part-time schedules; and these, in turn, are different from those of a department of a new, rapidly expanding branch of a State university, or of the parent university itself, which may enroll 600 'majors', have a graduate enrollment of three or four hundred, and a supporting staff of fifty teaching fellows at work in remedial Freshman courses.



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Often, in the recruiting of a chairman, too little attention is paid to these differences. When the appointment of a new man is imminent, a committee writes to a dozen or more well-established departments seeking nominations—but rarely specifying what conditions are to be met, exactly what resources are available, and what guarantees can be offered to the new incumbent, who is, of course, to be endowed with all the virtues—profound scholarship, capacity for leadership, a high degree of professional visibility, etc., etc. After an anxious search, the decision is usually made to appoint someone already on the campus. But whether he is selected from the talent available at home, or invited from abroad, the nominee usually lacks the experience and knowledge needed if, before committing himself, he is to ask the right questions, make the right demands, and conduct a thorough investigation of the situation with which he must cope if he accepts the post. Deans and presidents are full of good will and promises, ready with assurances that everything will be for the best, and sure that no problem really need be resolved by anticipation. Rarely will they go on record, fully and definitely in writing, in support of a policy, or the adequate financing of needed reforms. Often, indeed, they cannot—because of the nature of academic administration.

Increasingly, the educational establishment is dependent on public funds; and these funds, though often generously disbursed, come to schools, colleges, and universities through channels which are politically controlled, and are consequently susceptible of quick diversion in one direction or another. Long range planning, even short-range budget making, becomes a chancy business as competition for the tax-dollar increases. As the political scene changes, and as the demands of students within and the public without grow and shift, the college or university administrator finds himself in a position of considerable difficulty. Though no worse off than those who manage large industries or businesses, the academic manager is different from other managers—and this difference lies chiefly in his attitude. He is loath to assume completely the role of a responsible executive; what he cherishes above all else is his amateur standing.

The tradition which directs that institutions of higher learning be led by those with unimpeachable academic credentials and experience is a good one. But the tradition that large colleges and universities should be run on a town meeting plan, and that any sensible professor can take over an administrative post as an extra-curricular chore, is outmoded. It worked well enough when colleges and departments were fairly homogeneous, small enough to function as communities, with well-understood problems, and with business simple enough to be handled in the family style. Since none of these conditions now exists in a majority of institutions, to direct them well requires not only skillful leadership, so that the best possible use can be made of the wisdom of faculty groups through their democratic participation in policy- and decision-making, but also a professional command of many skills and knowledges.

This statement is not the prelude to a plea for more courses and degrees in college administration—though some of the work being done in this field is obviously of first-rate quality. What is being argued is that a managerial revolution in education is occurring, with the result that administrative and executive functions become increasingly important, and the training for them a necessity. It is now entirely possible in a well-conducted college to set up programs which will induct those who have the right talents and inclination into minor administrative positions. There they (and their colleagues) can discover whether they possess abilities that will qualify them to progress until they are members of a cadre from which principal administrative officers may be drawn when circumstances call for new appointments.

Certainly departments of large or moderate size have a similar opportunity. Few appear to make the best possible use of it. If better use were made, there would be less stir when a chairman is to be replaced. It is not always possible, of course,

to find the right man within every department; but if the process of trial and scrutiny went on continuously, the lack would be discovered before the crisis occurred, and new appointees with the qualifications needed would be brought in and trained up so that they could be pressed into service when the time for change arrived.

What is suggested, then, is that frequent changes in chairmanships may be attributed partly to a lack of systematic programs of induction, partly to a system of rotation and short-term appointments which once had its uses but is now obsolete. A responsible chairman, in an institution of any size, must prepare himself, or be prepared by wise guidance, for his job—and he must approach it with a professional spirit. To be sure, he may request, or be required to accept, a probationary appointment. If he does well, however, he is launched on a career—a career which will allow him little time for sabbatical leaves, extensive research projects, or even a large amount of teaching. He will find that his days are filled with meetings, conferences, the drafting of innumbrable reports and proposals, the supervision of projects, curriculum planning, personnel matters, and the handling of an enormous correspondence. Much department business can be delegated—some of it to a non-academic staff. But delegation often complicates, rather than simplifies, the conduct of business, and it does not always lighten responsibility. At best the chairman can expect a good deal of what Professor Louis Bredvold, himself for many years the chairman of a large department, called "grinding work."

It is not work which suits every taste—not work lightly to be taken up or laid down. The future is full of uncertainties—the educational establishment has promised more than it can perform with the resources likely to be available; the public expects from Departments of English services which these Departments are not now prepared to supply; scholarship and graduate studies in the humanities are not in a wholly healthy state; collective bargaining is bringing new concepts of professional life. Whatever their wishes, chairmen will be obliged to work out new combinations, to find new methods for dealing with larger staffs, larger student enrollments, with manifestations of faculty power and student power, the claims of a disturbed and dissatisfied society. They will play larger and larger roles as the academic scene expands; and to do so successfully they will have to broaden their professional knowledge, and accept increased administrative responsibilities—not as a temporary burden, but as a long-term obligation.

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